

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **COLORADO BUTTERFLY PLANT TO RECEIVE PROTECTION UNDER ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT**

The Colorado butterfly plant, a rare short-lived perennial herb, will be listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

The only known populations of the Colorado butterfly plant are mostly on private land within a small area in southeastern Wyoming, western Nebraska, and north-central Colorado. With less than 50,000 reproducing individuals, only 10 of the 14 current populations are considered stable or increasing.

The plant is found in moist areas of floodplains and stands 2-3 feet tall with one or a few reddish, fuzzy stems and white flowers that turn pink or red with age. Only a few flowers are open at one time and these are located below the rounded buds and above the mature fruits. Non-flowering plants consist of a stemless, basal rosette of oblong, hairless leaves 1-7 inches long.

Non-selective herbicide spraying, haying and mowing at certain times of year, some water development, land conversion for cultivation, competition from exotic plants, and loss of habitat to urban growth are the main threats to the plant. The low numbers and limited distribution of this herbaceous plant contribute to its vulnerability to natural and human-caused disturbances and environmental stresses. Further reduction in the number of plants could affect its reproductive capability and the genetic diversity of the species.

Two populations of the Colorado butterfly plant occur on F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming. In 1990, a research natural area was established to include all the known, naturally-occurring populations on the base. Additionally, various agreements have been implemented to provide protection to the plant on the base and it is the intent of the Service to meet with private landowners and develop further agreements.

Native plants are important for their ecological, economic and aesthetic values. Plants play an important role in development of crops that resist disease, insects and drought. At least 25 percent of prescription drugs contain ingredients derived from plant compounds, including treatments for cancer, juvenile leukemia, heart disease and malaria, and medicines to assist in organ transplants. Plants are also being used to develop natural pesticides.

A species is deemed to be threatened if it is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. The Endangered Species Act directs Federal agencies to protect and promote the recovery of listed species. Collection of listed plants on Federal lands is unlawful. In addition, proposed Federal projects and actions require review to ensure they will not jeopardize the survival of the species. For private and non-Federal landowners, consultations come into play only in cases where activities involving listed species require Federal funding or permitting. The endangered Species Act does not prohibit "take" of listed plants on private lands, but landowners must comply with State laws protecting imperiled plants. The Service does not expect the addition of the Colorado butterfly plant to the threatened species list to affect the regular practices of most farmers, ranchers, and businesses.

A complete description of the final rule listing this plant is published in today's *Federal Register*.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 530 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.